



What's in a Name?

Posted by **Pierluigi Oliverio** on Monday, November 26, 2007

History was made last Tuesday night at City Hall when over 1,000 people gathered there, packing the Council Chambers, the rotunda and all the community rooms. Approximately 200 people from the crowd spoke at the meeting. They were old and young, male and female, recent immigrants and those here for decades. The topic was the naming of a business district

As a son of immigrant Italian parents, I can appreciate the longing for names that recognize a culture from another country. I am not immersed in Vietnamese-American politics nor have I experienced the fall of my homeland. However, one can empathize with the emotion and intellect that was displayed at the meeting.

Freedom of speech was heard loud and clear. Speakers shared their feelings blatantly, which in some cases seemed like personal attacks rather than objective disagreements. It was personally difficult for me to hear members of the community speak so harshly of Madison Nguyen and Mayor Reed. However, my colleagues and I are elected officials and we are not better than anyone; therefore, it is important for freedom of speech to prevail, despite how harsh the comments may have been. Almost all the speakers that night were in favor of "Little Saigon."

In June I voted in favor of RDA doing outreach to come up with a name and eventually place signs on Story Road. In general I like signs. In my travels to over 40 countries I have seen signage signify distinct areas of a city: Little Africa in Paris, Little Italy in New York, Little Istanbul in Berlin, etc. Signs bring distinction and importance to a geographic area and are testament to the hard work of ALL immigrant groups. Signs should be used in San Jose to support neighborhood business districts and our distinctive older neighborhoods.

San Jose is a celebration of diversity and the immigrant experience. We are a collection of peoples from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. It is not a surprise that many ethnicities would like to have a

district named after their homeland. Signs are symbols that can bring distinction and a sense of belonging to a geographic area.

I drove to Story Road the weekend before the vote to look at the area and visualize the future signs that our city would pay for through RDA funds. Afterwards, I kept driving east from the proposed Vietnamese Business District through several Strong Neighborhood Initiative (SNI) neighborhoods east of 101 and saw that there was still a lot to do. (SNI neighborhoods are funded through RDA funds.)

So the question came to me: Do I vote on funding \$100,000 for signs that divide people or spend that \$100,000 to help initiatives in those same SNI neighborhoods? I would rather put that \$100,000 to those SNI neighborhoods in East San Jose where the residents are united about a particular neighborhood improvement; therefore, I voted no.

Madison Nguyen is strong in character and conviction and was a brave soul last Tuesday night. She is an effective advocate for the residents of District 7 and I am proud to serve with her. Elected officials should not be judged on one vote but the totality of their deeds and actions. It is important to allow for flexibility in government and to understand that there will be votes where people will have differences of opinions. Those differences should not be exploited but rather embraced and respected as essential ingredients of a true democratic process.

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